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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR OES/IHA, CA/OCS, AF/EPS AND AF/W
NAIROBI FOR CDC/MARK KATZ

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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [KSAF](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: SENEGAL - RELATIVELY WELL-PREPARED FOR AVIAN/PANDEMIC
INFLUENZA

REF: STATE 022991 AND SUBSEQUENT DAKAR-STATE E-MAILS

¶1. SUMMARY: Senegal appears relatively well-prepared to cope with an outbreak of Avian and/or Pandemic Influenza (AIPI). The Government of Senegal has an active AI working group and has hosted a number of AIPI conferences and exercises. The USG has also hosted several regional seminars on AIPI in Dakar. Surveillance for AI in the domestic and wild bird populations is active and ongoing, and local laboratory and medical facilities are the best in the region. More can be done to increase the capabilities of other West African countries to prepare for and deal with AIPI, specifically, offering workshops in English and Portuguese. Workshops build capacity, pay diplomatic dividends, and establish the relationships that will allow us to offer effective assistance when AI appears. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Background: Avian influenza appears to have largely spared West Africa thus far, with cases of AI in poultry confirmed in Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. Despite concern about the West Africa's position along migratory bird routes, no cases in wild bird populations have been reported. To date, only one human death has been attributed to AI so far, in Nigeria in January 2007.

GOVERNMENT OF SENEGAL ACTIONS

¶3. The Government of Senegal is not relying on continuing good fortune, however, and has been admirably proactive in preparing for an AIPI outbreak. There is a National Committee to Prevent and Fight AI (CONAGA), which includes representatives from the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministries of Livestock, Health, Environment and Protection of Nature, Interior, Armed Forces, Communications, and Commerce.

¶4. CONAGA conducted an AI field response simulation exercise November 4 through 8, 2006, in Somone, Senegal, attended by participants from 18 West Africa countries. CONAGA also hosted a three-day workshop on AI prevention, March 19-21, in Dakar. More than 60 participants from the scientific, NGO, professional, and public sectors participated. In addition, CONAGA is performing active AI surveillance and has collected samples from chicken, domestic ducks, swine, horses and wild birds (serum, feces, tracheal swabs) from almost 500 animals since December 2006 in the St. Louis, Ziguinchor, and Fatick regions. A sick bird from Dakar was also tested in February. All samples have been tested negative to HPAI (AGID and PCR). In March, CONAGA will collect samples in other regions. A Peace Corps volunteer working in the bird sanctuary in Djoudj (near St. Louis in northern Senegal) has not reported any cases of ill or dying birds.

¶5. The Institut Pasteur in Dakar can test for the H5N1 virus, allowing for quick diagnosis if/when H5N1 appears in Senegal. The medical care in Dakar is the best in the region.

¶6. The National veterinary laboratory (LNERV-ISRA) can test for H5N1 virus allowing for quick diagnosis when H5N1 appears in the poultry population. The laboratory has a good cooperative relationship with FAO, which is using the laboratory as a regional training center.

USG TRAINING AND OUTREACH

¶7. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) sponsored a workshop on International Avian Influenza Epidemiology for 27 senior veterinary epidemiologists from the veterinary services of 21 countries in western and central Africa in Dakar, March 5-9. This seminar provided knowledge and strategies for participant nations to improve surveillance and diagnostic capacity for AI and other animal diseases of economic importance. The APHIS epidemiologists not only conducted needed training but also worked with individual country epidemiologists to review and refine the design of their country's AI surveillance activities. The International AI Epidemiology workshop is one of the many technical activities USDA-APHIS has sponsored for specialists from African veterinary services; this was the second in a series of three USDA-APHIS seminars in Europe/Africa/Middle East to discuss the design and implementation of epidemiological surveillance programs.

¶8. USDA has been actively involved with capacity building programs that include AI laboratory diagnostician's training, trans-boundary animal disease diagnosis as well as supplying reagents for the laboratory. The USG will also supply a real time rt-PCR, sophisticated equipment that will further increase diagnostic capability.

¶9. The Public Affairs Section, in conjunction with Voice of America's Office of Development and International Media Training

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Team, hosted a two-day informational workshop in Dakar on avian influenza issues for Francophone West African journalists March 14-15. VOA trainers and scientific experts discussed AI basics with an emphasis on generating informed and accurate news coverage on the topic, especially if/when there is an H5N1 outbreak. Twenty-one participants attended, representing Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo (Brazzaville), Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal (Dakar and Saint-Louis) and Togo. Ambassador Janice Jacobs, who opened the workshop with an overview of USG support for global efforts in countering the spread of AIPI, and APHIS gave a presentation to the group.

¶10. Workshop participants agreed to establish an African journalists' network to share information on AI issues. Within three days the event generated more than two dozen article placements in Senegalese media, including articles on the March 14 USDA-FAO agreement on coordinating technical assistance in response to AIPI.

¶11. The Center for Disease Control's (CDC's) Nairobi office conducted AI Rapid Response Training in Dakar March 5-8. Forty-one participants from eight Francophone African countries participated, including clinicians, medical epidemiologists, veterinarians, laboratory technicians, and communications specialists. It was a train-the-trainer exercise focusing on organizing a multi-sector response to an AI outbreak in poultry and/or humans. Participants came from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Rwanda and Senegal.

¶12. Other mission offices have also been deeply involved in preparing for AI. USAID's Economic Growth Office funded AI posters and leaflets, which CONAGA has distributed throughout the country. In conjunction with Catholic Relief Services, USAID has produced a television public-service announcement to educate the general population about AI. This spot began airing the week of March 5; it includes tips for prevention and discusses how public alerts and quarantine would be used to control an outbreak. The Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation has requested from the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) 200 sets of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to

be distributed to Senegalese military personnel who would be among the first responders in the event of an outbreak.

¶13. The Consular Section regularly includes AI information in its monthly e-mail newsletter to American citizens, including general AI information, safe food handling tips, shelter-in-place procedures, and links to the CDC and pandemicflu.gov websites. We also forwarded Nigeria's warden message announcing the first AI human death in Africa. AI was a primary focus of the Town Hall meeting on January 25 in Dakar that was attended by approximately 200 American citizens and a similar meeting in Bissau on March 22 that brought together 25 Americans. The section also distributed AI posters to consular wardens.

LOOKING FORWARD

¶14. Although the Western Coast of Africa has dodged AI so far, it is likely that AI will eventually appear in the region. The World Health Organization mandates that AI cases in humans be reported to its regional office in Brazzaville. The World Animal Health Organization (OIE) mandates that notifiable AI in birds be reported to the international headquarters in Paris, France. With only a handful of medical epidemiologists to cover all of Sub-Saharan Africa, however, it is likely that the USG will first learn of AI cases directly from local and regional officials. It is crucial that posts in the region cultivate and maintain excellent relationships with local human and animal health officials.

¶15. Embassy Dakar urges that AIPI training be expanded and offered in Portuguese and English. Lusophone African countries including Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau could all participate in a single workshop. Anglophone workshops conducted in West Africa would reach West African officials and institutions who were unable to attend sessions in East Africa, such as the seminar CDC conducted for Anglophone East African countries in September 2007. AIPI training such as the APHIS, CDC, and VOA workshops pay valuable public diplomacy dividends in addition to sharing up-to-date technical and strategic knowledge. Perhaps more important, such workshops cultivate USG and post relationships with local officials, making it more likely that the USG will receive early notice of AI cases, allowing us to offer assistance to help stop AI outbreaks before they become widespread.

JACOBS